

Good morning. My name is Jay Bartolomei.

I am President of AFSCME Local 714 representing over 800 members, primarily employees of the State of Ct, Dept of Social Services. I also have worked for DSS for 24 years, administering SNAP and formerly Food Stamp Assistance.

I am speaking today regarding House Bill No. 5434:

AN ACT CONCERNING PROCESSING OF SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICATIONS.

"To maximize the number of SNAP applications submitted to the United States Department of Agriculture, to maximize the amount of federal dollars eligible persons in the state receive under SNAP and to maximize the state's potential to receive performance bonus dollars."

Over the course of the last several years we have seen our caseloads increase exponentially without a commensurate increase in staffing to service this state's neediest citizens. We lost many employees under the Rowland layoffs and ERIP program in 2003. In 2009, we lost many more staff to another Retirement Incentive Program. At the same time, the economy plunged and the federal government and Connecticut's new rules made many more people eligible for this assistance than were previously. This combination of factors has created a situation that calls for increased staffing to keep up with exponential growth of the need for SNAP assistance.

I would urge that this bill provides the necessary DSS positions to fully staff those jobs that administer this program. I would also urge that any new application procedures would fully utilize the DSS worker as the primary person that applicants would apply with.

I have witnessed and heard discussions that about privatizing or contracting some of this work to the Community Action Agencies. These agencies are partners in delivering many services to the public and can assist some applicants now in applying. However, the DSS Eligibility Worker should be the one to interview the applicant and make the final determination. This would guarantee that the appropriate policy and laws were followed; would offer greater control of program administration; and ensure accountability to the public, to legislators like yourselves and those at the USDA who oversee the program at the federal level.

Those of us who work in this program know full well that under the previous administration Social Services and aid to the needy were not a priority. Now is the time to add more workers to the Department so we indeed can fully help those who need food assistance and make the program more accessible. Also, if the necessary amount of staff are hired and access is increased, this in turn will increase the state's economic health and have a multiplier effect when those newly granted recipients spend their SNAP dollars at local businesses and in our communities. I call that "win-win."

Thank you very much.